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# *SHAILER MATHEWS*

BORN PORTLAND, MAINE, MAY 26, 1863

DIED CHICAGO, ILLINOIS, OCTOBER 23, 1941

THESE SELECTIONS ARE FROM THE MEMORIAL  
SERVICE HELD IN JOSEPH BOND CHAPEL, THE UNI-  
VERSITY OF CHICAGO, ON SUNDAY, OCTOBER 26, 1941

The Twenty-third Psalm in Dean Mathews' own handwriting, and the poem which follows, were found in his copy of the *Book of Common Prayer*, where he kept them to use in memorial services for his friends.

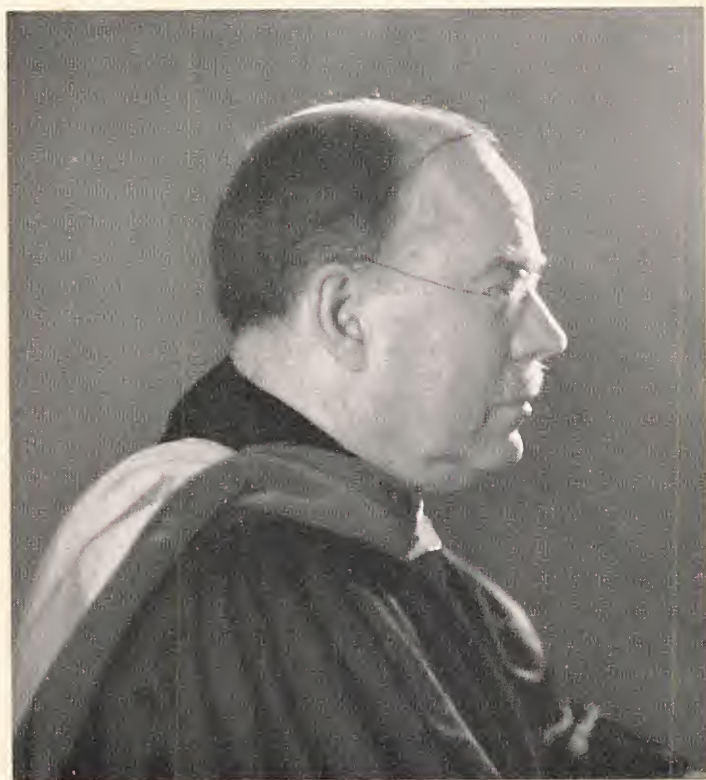
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## THE TWENTY-THIRD PSALM

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*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.*

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## A MORNING THOUGHT

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*What if some morning, when the stars were paling,  
And the dawn whitened, and the East was clear,  
Strange peace and rest fell on me from the presence  
Of a benignant Spirit standing near:*

*And I should tell him, as he stood beside me,  
"This is our Earth—most friendly Earth, and fair;  
Daily its sea and shore through sun and shadow  
Faithful it turns, robed in its azure air:*

*"There is blest living here, loving and serving,  
And quest of truth, and serene friendships dear;  
But stay not, Spirit! Earth has one destroyer—  
His name is Death: flee, lest he find thee here!"*

*And what if then, while the still morning brightened,  
And freshened in the elm the Summer's breath,  
Should gravely smile on me the gentle angel  
And take my hand and say, "My name is Death."*

## PRAYER

BY ROLLAND W. SCHLOERB

Minister of the Hyde Park Baptist Church

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*God of the generations, who hast made us a part of the enduring fellowship begun by our Lord Christ, we rejoice in all who have served well their day and generation. Especially do we thank thee this day for him in remembrance of whom we gather in this place of worship. He has enriched our common life by what he taught and wrote and did, as well as by what he was. By his gracious touch, by his aptly chosen words, by his unfailing loyalty, he has made truth memorable and goodness attractive.*

*Teach us in this hour to turn to the divine resources that were his stay, and let memory and steadfast hope do a fitting work among us and in the hearts of those who shared his home and fireside; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

## ADDRESS BY EDWIN E. AUBREY

*Professor of Christian Theology and Ethics*

*The Divinity School*

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### DEAN MATHEWS' CONTRIBUTION TO THEOLOGY

MEN ARE ASKING TODAY, perhaps more insistently than ever before, whether Christianity is relevant to the social scene. To this question Dean Mathews gave an unequivocal, affirmative answer. As one of the earliest leaders in the social gospel movement in America, he gave direction to the serious study of the social implications of Christian ethics. As a historian of theology, he applied the methods of social history to the study of the history of doctrine. As a distinguished modernist, he sought to implement Christian faith by the findings and the methods of modern science.

Shortly after he came to the University in 1894, Mr. Mathews began contributing a series of articles to the *American Journal of Sociology* on social aspects of Jesus' teaching, which were later gathered into an epoch-making book on *The Social Teaching of Jesus*.



The influence of this volume upon theological thinking in America and upon the redefinition of the scope and function of Christian ethics would be hard to overestimate. He it was, too, who encouraged Francis Peabody to publish his volume along the same lines; and these men may be regarded as the pioneers of Christian sociology in America.

It is said of the late President Judson of this University that as a ministerial student he read Shedd's *Systematic Theology* and decided to change to the study of law. Shedd's was the most recent of the treatises in this field when Mr. Mathews entered upon his higher education, and it is hard for us now to imagine the mechanical and dreary character of this type of theological writing. With a background of training in social science at the University of Berlin, Mr. Mathews turned his attention to the study of the social genesis of Christian doctrine. Perhaps his New England background led him to seek the facts behind the verbiage; but at any rate he showed a growing concern with the way in which doctrines and creedal formulas arise in the history of the Christian group. The core of life in Christianity was to him the attitude of loyalty to Jesus and his ideals. Out of such loyalty earlier theologies had been born as men sought to make their faith intelligible in terms of the patterns of thought which character-



ized the social life of successive epochs in the history of Western culture. Dean Mathews showed in various historical writings how the characteristic analogies employed in Christian doctrine have been drawn from the social environment. He often referred to theology as "transcendentalized politics." I recall his recommendation to our class in theology that we should go to the Loop to see Karel Capek's *Liliom* in order the better to understand the conception of God as judge. Since theology was a part of the fabric of social life, it was subject to the laws of change which characterize all social development, and consequently the formulas of theology were to be regarded as themselves relative and not absolute truths. This did not deprive the ancient creeds of their inspiration, for they were examples of men seeking to state in the language of their day a great common faith which we in turn must re-express in words closer to the experience of our own generation. He used to say at the opening of the year, when he welcomed new students, that the Divinity School is not a theological beauty parlor which will guarantee to put a permanent wave in anyone's theology.

With this approach to the study of theology, it is not surprising that he lent to it the vital and vivacious quality and the moral vigor of his own life. He

was not in general favorable to mysticism, because he felt the center of Christianity to be a moral insight grounded in a faith in God. God he thought of as the energy at work in the world making for the enrichment of human personality and of personal relations among men.

His attitude toward science was never apologetic but appropriative. The very title of his book on the relations of religion and science is significant: *Contributions of Science to Religion*. In editing this book, with a group of Chicago scientists, he left each scientist perfectly free to expound his scientific conclusions in his own way, and then used his own section of the volume to indicate how Christian thinking might be enriched by the absorption of these established findings. He did not believe that science could be any more identified with a particular stage of its speculative conclusions than could theology, and consequently he was never willing to identify natural science with a mechanistic materialism which, in his own words, thought of man as "a peripatetic chemical laboratory driven around by the sex instinct." He shared with the scientists, however, the same openness to the future and believed that theology would find its best contemporary patterns in the field of scientific concepts. His view of God was thus expressed in terms of what he

called "the personality producing activities of the cosmos," the combination of forces working toward the production and enrichment of human life. It was characteristic of his openness to growth that in his last book, *Is God Emeritus?* he even developed this theme with bold innovations in his own thinking.

Shailer Mathews was not a systematic theologian. He was suspicious of systems because they tended to fixate theology in static formulas. He frequently insisted that he was trying to give his students a method of working out theology and was not attempting to establish a new orthodoxy. This distrust of systems led him to eschew metaphysical speculation and often to underestimate its importance in theological thought. In this he was undoubtedly influenced by the reaction against Hegelian metaphysics which characterized the German historians of the late nineteenth century, and he also shared the feeling of the German theologian Ritschl that metaphysical speculation could not furnish a grasp of the moral task confronting the church.

For this reason Dean Mathews was not the founder of a school of theology, except in the sense that he trained his students in a method of theological reconstruction. The basis of such reconstruction was to be the history of Christian doctrine which had achieved influence by integrating itself in the

thought of successive stages of European civilization. Its roots were in the religious life of the Christian group. Accordingly, when great changes took place in the intellectual climate of the group, the established thought patterns of theology were subject to dissolution. Outmoded doctrines were therefore to be understood in terms of their functional significance in their own day and thus appreciated; but they were not to be allowed to shackle the Christian in an age confronted with new problems and new social patterns. This explained his attitude toward those who attacked him so bitterly in the modernist-fundamentalist controversy. He appreciated the background from which they spoke and was therefore indisposed to use invective. He once told me that in all controversial debates he had gone on the principle that he would try not to say anything for which he would need later to apologize. At the same time, his remarkable gift of epigram served as a powerful weapon in detaching men's emotions from a mawkish sentimentalism for the old doctrines. He himself once defined an epigram as "a half-truth so stated as to annoy the man who believes the other half," and in this sense he was doubtless, as a master of epigram, a source of disturbance to many conservatives. But his steady search for values in the old always protected him from super-

ciliousness, and people who studied his restatements of doctrine saw in them the same faith as that which had motivated Christians down through the centuries. He felt this to be a perennial process and was not in the least disturbed if students found different ways from his of stating what they regarded as the fundamental insights of Christianity. He was therefore able to face the future fearlessly and was always ready to bid Godspeed to any who would take his method and push it farther than he himself might do.

For this reason he will live on in the work of his students and readers, and of those whom they teach, because he imparted a fundamental method rather than a final formulation. For the explication of that method American theology will always owe him a profound debt of gratitude.

## ADDRESS BY CHARLES W. GILKEY

*Dean of the University of Chicago Chapel*

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SHAILER MATHEWS came to the University of Chicago in 1894, at the age of thirty-one, as Associate Professor of New Testament History. For seven years before that decisive move westward from New England he had been teaching history and political economy at his own alma mater, Colby College, in his native state of Maine. After three years here, he was advanced to a full professorship. In 1899, under Dean Hulbert, he was appointed Junior Dean of the Divinity School. In those distant days the two deans had one part-time stenographer, in one small office. Nine years later he succeeded Dean Hulbert; and meanwhile his own chair had been changed to that of historical theology. When he retired in 1933, at the age of seventy, he had served as Dean of the Divinity School for twenty-five years and in the Dean's office for thirty-four years. He had then been a member of this Faculty for thirty-nine years and a teacher for forty-six years. Includ-



ing the eight years since his retirement, he has lived and worked in this neighborhood for forty-seven years.

These bare chronological facts make it plain that, while he was not one of our "aborigines" (as we have always called the original Faculty), he came so near it—coming to the University only two years after its opening—and he has played so large a part in making both the Divinity School and the University what they have characteristically become, that we inevitably rank him as one of our "Elder Statesmen." He is the last of that little group who made the Divinity School one of the outstanding educational centers in contemporary religion. For, though the School is half again as old as the University itself, it was shaped to its well-known character and apparent destiny chiefly under his leadership as Dean, by teachers like Harper and Burton, the two Smiths, Price, and himself—all of whom with his passing are gone. Our present Faculty belong to a younger generation, facing new problems in a changing and tragic time; from now on we shall have to find our own way, for the last of our Elder Statesmen is gone from among us.

Amid these changes, we can already see more clearly what have been some of his greatest achievements. He struck and held steady the balance be-



tween the two characteristic functions of this Divinity School—as a professional school for the training of ministers and religious workers and as a graduate school for the study of religion in human life and history. He kept that balance through a generation of great changes in both religious thought and life, when new facts and new points of view were constantly being piled into both scales. The three thousand graduates whom the Divinity School has trained for religious leadership, and the hundreds it has sent forth to teach religion in more than one hundred colleges and theological seminaries throughout the world, all alike looked to him as their common leader and teacher. Not only by his administrative policies, but in his own person, he held together these two historic functions of the Divinity School, as a “school of the prophets” and as a place of training for scholars and teachers in religion.

Dean Mathews’ creative leadership in religion extended far beyond the outreach of the Divinity School and the University of Chicago; well beyond those farther channels of influence developed by the University itself, through its Institute of Sacred Literature and its University Press. Through the Hyde Park Baptist Church, of which he was an active member for forty-seven years; through the Baptist Executive Council, which as president he trans-

formed into an aggressive agency for co-operation among Chicago Baptists; through the Chicago Church Federation and the Northern Baptist Convention; and especially through the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, of which he was president for one four-year term, he powerfully influenced contemporary American Protestantism toward unity and efficiency. For decades he was one of Macmillan's chief advisers in the selection of their religious publications. He was director of religious studies and work at Chautauqua for twenty-two summers—one of the most far-reaching and influential of his numberless and tireless activities; and a recent bas-relief in the Hall of Missions there is a fitting recognition of his considerable part in making Chautauqua what it is today. Nor did his influence on the religion of his generation stop at our own shores. His interest in Christian unity and in world peace took him early to Japan, later to the universities of India as Barrows Lecturer, and regularly to meetings of the Church Peace Union and the World Alliance for International Friendship through the Churches, both in America and in Europe.

William R. Harper, Ernest D. Burton, and Shailer Mathews were such a trio of religious leaders as perhaps no other American university has ever

brought together within one generation—such as we are not likely to see together again here or elsewhere. They were not only outstanding theological scholars and educators, but also pioneering guides in the religious life and work of their generation.

So far we have been thinking of the well-earned honor we have gathered to pay to one of the foremost religious thinkers and leaders of our time. It is my great privilege now to say something on behalf of all those, here and elsewhere, who are thinking chiefly today of the friend and neighbor they have trusted and loved. Dean Mathews' own familiar thought that God is our religious name for "the personality-producing forces in the universe" was unconsciously the more revealing on his lips and pen because the universe had produced in him so vivid and lovable a personality. In his presence many of us found it easy and appropriate to recall the old quip that "the noblest work of God is a New Englander gone west." Like his lifelong friend, Rufus M. Jones, by common consent the most eminent living member of the Society of Friends, Shailer Mathews remained always a down-east Yankee at heart, with roots deep in the soil and heritage of their native Maine. This New England heritage showed plainly in his devotion to his ancestral acres near Monson in cen-

tral Maine, which he transformed into an up-to-date apple orchard in the hope of keeping it in the family for his children and grandchildren, as his parents and grandparents had cleared and built it up for him. It showed equally in his pride in his four grandchildren (there are five now) and in his two namesakes, a nephew and a grandson. Not least, it showed in his aphoristic Yankee wit, with its characteristic combination of insight and brevity.

The Dean's sense of humor can be adequately described only by one word: it was "Mathewsian." Ever since his illness, and more especially since his passing, his neighbors and colleagues, meeting on the street, have tarried to exchange reminiscences about his pungent sayings. If these shadowed days could thus be lightened by the sparkle of his wit, how much more will it warm and brighten our memories of him for long years to come. At its best, his humor always reminded me of skyrockets or Roman candles after dark on the Fourth of July, that scatter successive showers of changing colors which nobody can foretell—while the small boys murmur their "ohs" and "ahs" in chorus at each new burst of brilliance. The Dean himself, like these small boys, never seemed to know just what was coming next when his mind started to coruscate, and

was as much surprised and pleased at its unexpectednesses as any bystander.

Sometimes this humor was boyishly playful—like the twinkle in his eye and the hesitation in his speech before its sudden flash. Once when he came home from the Pacific Coast, he told his neighbors what a joy it had been to meet so many people whom one had never expected to see alive again; and then he called southern California “Land’s End for the Stygian ferry.” Long years ago a colleague hailed him on the street with “Good morning—and how’s Jonah?” “What have I got to do with Jonah?” replied the Dean. “Well, you’re in theology, and isn’t Jonah in theology too?” “Oh no,” came his answering shot, “Jonah isn’t in theology, he’s in ichthyology.” I still remember with delight across twenty-five years his description of some saints who were “not only salt that has lost its savor, but pepper that has lost its pep.”

More often, however, his wit became a memorable vehicle for penetrating insights. Such was his famous description of theological reactionaries as “our contemporary ancestors.” Such, too, was his unforgettable comment on the debunking school of biographers when they were most in vogue. They were insisting, he remarked, that the reason George

Washington had a firm mouth and a square jaw was not because his character was like that, but because his false teeth didn't fit. The only trouble with that explanation, he added, was that every man with false teeth does not become the father of a country. His colleague, Dr. E. S. Ames, came home from the Disciples' National Convention some years ago to report that the most memorable utterance there was a remark by Dean Mathews in an address on Christian unity, that in order to love your Christian brethren you do not always have to like them!

The most characteristic and memorable of all "Mathewsian" stories that I know is told by one of our Divinity Faculty who was in conference with the Dean years ago just before the hour for Divinity Chapel. His secretary came in to remind him that he was to lead Chapel that day, and that the Faculty was already forming for the processional. Under the pressure of an overburdened morning in the office, he had completely forgotten that he was to lead; and as he hastily slipped into his academic gown, he asked what subject had been announced for the address. The secretary consulted the University calendar and replied, "Immortality." "Good Lord!" was his ejaculation as the procession started. A few minutes later came what his colleague calls the most



memorable address he ever heard at Divinity Chapel. It consisted of two sentences. "What gives me most concern about personal immortality, is not so much the question whether I shall have it, as the question what, if it is given me, I shall do with it. Let us pray."

The temptation to keep on recounting such winged words as these is all the stronger, not only because they are so characteristic of him and so easy to remember, but because they are so very much worth remembering. Two other marked traits, however, are as characteristic as his wit. One was the extraordinary versatility, not only of his professional interests but of his personal concerns. In his youth a college teacher of history and political economy, he wrote one of his most widely read and often republished textbooks on the French Revolution. He came to Chicago to teach New Testament history, and later moved into the chair of historical theology. Many of us remember the years when his responsibilities as an editor of publications, both religious and secular, were only less varied and exacting than his work as a teacher and administrator. This variety of interest and accomplishment was in turn made possible by another outstanding personal characteristic—his boundless energy. When he re-



tired eight years ago, someone remarked that it would need five men in their forties to take his place. One of our real reasons for comfort and gratitude today is that, with such a temperament, he has been spared a long and confining invalidism, and given a quick and merciful release.

Had the Dean moved away from this community when he retired in 1933, we should have missed one of the most revealing and enriching chapters in his whole life. We all know what a searching test of character retirement can prove—especially when one remains in the same neighborhood—but how triumphantly he met this final test his neighbors and friends well know. Had he moved away, those who felt sure that he could not always agree with the policies of others might then never have realized the self-restraint which kept him not only from criticism but even from comment. Those of us who have seen that silent self-restraint in daily action have recognized in it one of his noblest qualities. When, on the other hand, he was asked, as so frequently he was, to speak on behalf of all of us at some such service as this, how often in this very Chapel has he made the service unforgettable and heartening by his memorial addresses. His reminiscences of President Harper at the University luncheon on

July 1, in celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of his induction, will live in the memory of those who heard him then as the last and one of the finest of his tributes. So, too, he knew how to turn his own experience of life through these latest years into new instruments for the interpretation and restatement of his own deepest faiths. Anyone who knew him hardly needed to see the name of the author beneath the title of his last book, *Is God Emeritus?*

Most characteristic and endearing of all these later revelations was his readiness, after a lifetime of intense activity upon a national and international stage, to devote himself modestly and wholeheartedly to sharing in the common life and concerns of his own community. No task in the Hyde Park Baptist Church was too small for him to undertake it gladly. It is appropriate to recall today that for some time he had been chairman of that church's memorial fund, which receives and uses gifts in small amounts in memory of fellow-members who have passed over into the Unseen Fellowship. To the University of Chicago Settlement, back of the Stock Yards, he has given in these last years an amount and quality of service which only those who have seen some part of his twenty-nine years of continuous membership on its Board, and his inval-

uable chairmanship of its Finance Committee in recent years, can fully appreciate. It is therefore appropriate that the Mathews Memorial Fund, already started by his friends and former students, should contemplate some gift to the Settlement in his memory—and also some suitable memorial in the Community House in Monson, Maine, for the construction of which he himself gave the lumber. Those who have known both Shailer Mathews and Paul Shorey in the decades through which they have shared the comradeships of this Faculty and this neighborhood, will be sure that both men would have been happy in the knowledge that their ashes now rest side by side in a permanent resting place, in the heart of the community they both loved.

No need to say to this company what reward of affection these forty-seven years in this community, and not least these later years, have brought to the Dean. Undergraduates who came here long after he had retired, and who knew nothing about him as a theologian, would be so captivated by his company for an evening or a week-end that they would come away asking, with the naïveté of youth, "Who is Shailer Mathews?" He himself once remarked that there were many people who he had no doubt would get to heaven, but whom he never expected

to meet there—"not if he could see them first!" Not so with him, so far as his students and colleagues and friends are concerned. If, to echo once more his own best-remembered Chapel talk, we who loved him and can never forget him find the gift of immortality bestowed on us also, we know well enough one of the first things we will do with it: we will seek out his wisdom, his wit, and his companionship—as of old.

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